

I MADE A PROMISE

"The Promise"  
Act Two, Part B

Written by  
[First Draft]

## ACT TWO, PART B

EXT. WHATCOM COMMUNITY COLLEGE - PARKING LOT - DAY

A small graduation ceremony, outdoors, socially distanced. Folding chairs six feet apart. Half the faces covered by masks. It's 2020 and everything is slightly wrong.

Mary crosses a makeshift stage in cap and gown. Secret walks beside her in a sit-stay rhythm -- three steps, pause, three steps, pause -- matching Mary's pace to the stage perfectly. A few people in the sparse audience laugh. A few more take photos.

Mom, Dad, and Izzy are in the audience, spread apart, masked. Mom is filming on her phone. Dad is clapping too loud.

Mary collects her associate's degree. She doesn't throw her cap. She walks off stage, kneels down, and shows Secret the diploma.

MARY

(to Secret)

Step one.

Secret sniffs the diploma. Licks it.

INT. MARY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT - MONTHS LATER

Mary at her desk. Two monitors now -- she's upgraded her setup. One screen has a UW application form. The other has a spreadsheet of pre-requisite courses, color-coded by status: completed, in progress, needed.

She's attacking this the way she attacks everything. There's a binder. There are tabs. She has mapped out every requirement and is grinding through them one by one.

Secret is on the bed, watching her. Seven years old now. Still alert, still checking in, but there's a settled quality to her -- a dog who has been working a long time and is very good at her job.

MARY

(not looking away from  
screen)

Dad and Spencer went to UW. We're  
going to UW.

Secret puts her chin on her paws.

MARY

Don't give me that. We're going.

INT. MARY'S BEDROOM - WEEKS LATER

Mary staring at her laptop. Her face is flat.

SCREEN: University of Washington -- Admissions Decision. "We  
are unable to offer you admission at this time. You have  
been placed on the waitlist."

Mary reads it twice. Closes the laptop. Opens it again.  
Reads it a third time.

Then she opens a new document and starts writing. A letter.  
Why she should be admitted. What she's done. What she's  
going to do. She writes it the way she builds training plans  
-- precise, relentless, not asking for sympathy, just making  
the case.

She writes for two hours. Sends it. Closes the laptop. Looks  
at Secret.

MARY

We're going.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Mary at the table, phone in hand. Mom is nearby, trying to  
look like she's not watching.

Mary's face changes. Just barely. The slightest loosening  
around her eyes.

MARY

I got in.

MOM

You got -- you got in?

MARY

Yeah. Off the waitlist. Fall  
quarter.

Mom hugs her. Mary tolerates the hug for three seconds, then gently disengages.

MARY

I need to figure out housing.  
They're not going to let me have  
Secret in the dorms. I need an  
apartment.

She's already solving the next problem. Mom is still crying.

EXT. UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON - CAMPUS - DAY

Fall 2021. Seattle. The UW campus is enormous after Bellingham -- Gothic architecture, 50,000 students, the particular energy of a major research university. Everything is louder, denser, faster.

Mary walks across Red Square with Secret. She's wearing a backpack that's too full. Secret is in her vest, professional, scanning the crowd the way she always does.

Students everywhere. Some glance at Secret. Most don't -- a service dog on a college campus isn't that unusual. But a few do double takes, recognizing them.

Mary checks her phone for a campus map. Looks up. Looks at the map. Looks up. She's navigating in real time, and it's work, but she's doing it.

MARY

(to Secret)

This way. I think.

They walk. Mary's mom, JENNIFER, appears behind them carrying a box. She's come for the first quarter to help Mary settle in.

MOM

Mary, slow down. I can't keep up  
and carry this.

MARY

Building's right there. Second floor.

She doesn't slow down. Mom adjusts the box and follows.

INT. MARY'S APARTMENT - DAY

A small one-bedroom near campus. Bare walls, basic furniture, the particular emptiness of a place nobody lives in yet.

Mary is already setting it up. Not decorating -- organizing. Secret's bed goes here. Leashes and vest hang here. Training treats in this cabinet. Her desk against this wall. She's building the infrastructure for their life, the same way she's always built things.

Mom watches from the doorway, holding a box of kitchen things.

MOM

Do you want me to help with --

MARY

I've got it. You can do the kitchen stuff.

They work in parallel. Mom in the kitchen, Mary building her system. Secret inspects every corner of the apartment, methodical, thorough. She lies down in the spot Mary designated for her bed and looks up, satisfied.

This is home now.

INT. UW - JAPANESE LANGUAGE CLASSROOM - DAY

Mary in class. A different kind of class than WCC -- bigger room, more students, faster pace. A JAPANESE LANGUAGE PROFESSOR is at the board, writing characters.

Secret is under the desk, invisible. Mary is writing the characters in her notebook, and there's something about her focus that's familiar -- the same precision she brings to training. A language is a system. Grammar is a protocol. This is learnable the way everything is learnable if you can see the structure.

The professor calls on her. Mary answers in Japanese. Her pronunciation isn't perfect but her grammar is exact. She's been studying ahead. Of course she has.

After class, a student named KENJI approaches.

KENJI

Hey -- your conjugation was really good. Are you in Tanaka-sensei's study group?

MARY

No.

KENJI

You should come. Thursday nights. We do practice conversation and sometimes watch movies without subtitles.

Mary considers this. A social invitation built around a structured activity with clear rules and a shared goal. This she can do.

MARY

Okay. Where?

Kenji grins. Mary doesn't grin back, but she writes down the details. Secret stands up beside her, ready to go.

EXT. UW CAMPUS - PATH - DAY

A beautiful day. Cherry blossoms along the quad. Mary and Secret walking between classes. Everything is working -- the apartment, the classes, the study group. Mary is navigating a university and a city and she's doing it.

Secret trots beside her. And then -- just for a second -- her back right leg hitches. A tiny irregularity in her gait. Not a stumble. More like a skip.

Mary notices. Of course Mary notices. She's spent seven years reading this dog's body.

She stops. Kneels down. Runs her hand along Secret's back leg, feeling the joints, the muscles. Secret stands patiently.

MARY

What was that?

Secret looks at her. Tail wag. Ready to keep walking.

Mary stands up. They keep walking. But Mary glances down twice in the next thirty seconds.

INT. MARY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT - DAYS LATER

Mary on the floor with Secret. She's watching Secret walk across the room. There it is again -- the slight hitch. Intermittent. Easy to miss if you aren't looking.

Mary picks up her phone. Puts it down. Picks it up.

She calls home.

MARY

(into phone)

Secret's doing something weird with her back leg.

DAD (O.S.)

Weird how?

MARY

Like a hitch. When she walks. It's not every time, but --

DAD (O.S.)

She probably tweaked something. She's seven. Dogs get sore.

MARY

Yeah. Probably.

She doesn't sound convinced. Neither does he.

INT. VETERINARY CLINIC - SEATTLE - DAY

Mary in an exam room. Secret on the table. A VET is palpating Secret's leg, moving the joint, watching her walk across the room.

VET

It could be a soft tissue thing. Let's do some bloodwork just to be

thorough.  
 Bloodwork. The word lands differently when you're Mary -- when you've spent your life learning to read bodies, when your whole world is built on one body being okay.

MARY

How long for results?

VET

Two to three days.  
 Mary nods. She puts Secret's vest back on. They walk out. Mary's hand is on Secret's back the whole way to the car.

INT. MARY'S APARTMENT - DAY

Mary's phone rings. She's at her desk doing homework. Secret is on the bed.

She answers. Listens. Her pen stops moving.

We don't hear what the vet says. We watch Mary's face. It doesn't crumble. It goes still. Completely still. The same stillness we saw when she was at the bottom in Act One, sitting against the wall of her stripped bedroom. The body's response to information it cannot process.

She hangs up. Sits for a long time. Secret, on the bed, lifts her head and looks at Mary. Thumps her tail once.

Mary gets up. Goes to the bed. Lies down beside Secret. Puts her face against Secret's fur the way she did the first day in the breeder's pen in Oregon.

She doesn't cry. She breathes.

INT. KITCHEN - FAMILY HOME - BELLINGHAM - NIGHT

Mary is home. She drove the ninety miles from Seattle that afternoon. The family is at the table. Nobody is eating.

MARY

It's leukemia. The bloodwork is -- it's bad. They want to do more tests but they were pretty clear.

MOM

What does that mean? What are the options?

MARY

Chemo. Radiation. There's a vet in Bellingham who does bone marrow transplants. He's one of two in the country.

DAD

Bone marrow transplants. On dogs.

MARY

On dogs. His name is Dr. Sullivan. He's right here.

Dad is quiet for a moment. The family knows about bone marrow transplants. Thirty years ago, Dad was a donor at Fred Hutchinson in Seattle. His brother Dan is still alive because of it.

DAD

Right here in Bellingham.

MARY

I'm going to call him tomorrow. I'm pulling out of school for the quarter. I'm coming home.

She says it the way she said "I want a dog" years ago. Not asking. Informing. And the same flat certainty is in her voice, but underneath it, if you know where to look, the ground is shaking.

IZZY

I'm going to set up a GoFundMe. For the treatment costs. People are going to want to help.

Mary looks at her sister. Izzy isn't the scared kid listening through the wall anymore. She's twenty years old and she's stepping up.

MARY

Okay.

Under the table, Secret is lying at Mary's feet. She doesn't know she's sick. She just knows everyone is sad and she should be close.

INT./EXT. - VARIOUS - THE FIGHT - MONTAGE

This section should feel like a campaign. Mary attacking the problem the way she attacks everything -- total commitment, obsessive detail, relentless forward motion. But this time the opponent doesn't respond to hard work.

Mary at Dr. Sullivan's clinic. A small, serious operation -- not a big hospital. Equipment that's specialized and a little worn. Dr. Sullivan (50s, quiet, the kind of vet who does this because he can't not) examining Secret, explaining the treatment protocol. Mary takes notes the way she takes training notes.

Mary at home, organizing medications. Pill bottles in a row, labeled, scheduled. A chart on the wall with dosing times. She's built a system.

SCREEN: Izzy's GoFundMe page. "Help Save Secret." The video is a compilation of Secret's best moments -- the dancing, the tricks, the painting, the sledding. It's devastating because we know what it's for. Donations pouring in. \$10,000. \$30,000. \$50,000. Messages from strangers around the world.

Mary driving Secret to chemo. Early morning, still dark. Secret in the back seat, looking out the window. Mary's hands on the wheel. This drive is going to become routine.

Mary at the clinic, watching Secret through a window during treatment. She can't be in the room. She sits in the waiting area with her laptop, doing homework she's not actually enrolled in anymore, just keeping her hands busy.

Mary at home at night, going over Secret's bloodwork results on her laptop. She's taught herself to read the numbers. White cell count. Platelet levels. She tracks them in a spreadsheet, looking for trends, looking for hope in the data.

Dad sits beside her. Looks at the spreadsheet. Doesn't say anything. He knows what those numbers looked like thirty years ago with his brother. He knows what a bone marrow transplant means.

DAD

How's she doing today?

MARY

White count is up from Monday.  
That's what we want. If it holds,  
she can start radiation in three  
weeks and then we go to LA for the  
transplant.

DAD

And if it doesn't hold?

Mary doesn't answer. She goes back to the spreadsheet.

INT./EXT. - VARIOUS - WEEKS PASSING

Time compressing. The fight wearing on.

Secret after chemo, lying on her bed, not moving much. Mary  
beside her on the floor, hand on Secret's ribs. Counting  
breaths the way she used to count trick repetitions.

Secret at the clinic. More bloodwork. Mary in the waiting  
room, knee bouncing, the anxiety that has always been under  
her surface now fully visible.

Secret in the backyard, trying to chase a ball. She gets  
halfway there and stops. Looks back at Mary. Her eyes are  
bright but her body is failing. The gap between her will and  
her capacity is widening every day.

Mary on the phone with the clinic in LA, confirming the  
radiation appointment. One week away. If Secret can hold on  
for one more week, they fly to LA. The transplant happens.  
The plan works. The system Mary built holds.

Mary at home, packing a bag for LA. She's methodical about  
it. Secret's medications. Her medical records. The  
spreadsheets, printed out. She packs the way she prepares  
for everything -- completely, precisely. As if preparation  
is a form of control. As if being ready enough can keep the  
thing from falling apart.

INT. MARY'S BEDROOM - BELLINGHAM - NIGHT

Mary and Secret on the bed. Late. The house is quiet.

Secret is lying on her side. She's thinner now. Her breathing is heavier than it should be. But she's awake, and she's looking at Mary with the same focus she's had since she was a puppy in a pen in Oregon.

Mary is looking back. Reading her. The way she's read this dog every day for seven years -- every ear flick, every weight shift, every change in breathing. She knows this body better than she knows her own.

And tonight she sees something she hasn't seen before. It's in Secret's eyes. Not pain -- Secret has been in pain for weeks and Mary knows what that looks like. This is something else. It's effort. Secret is holding on. Actively, deliberately, holding on. The way a climber holds a rope. And Mary can see why.

Secret is watching Mary's face and she's staying because Mary needs her to stay.

Mary's hand is on Secret's ribs. She can feel them. She couldn't feel them six months ago.

The LA bag is packed by the door. One week. They just need one more week.

Mary lies down. Face to face with Secret. She puts her forehead against Secret's forehead. They breathe together.

And then Mary says the hardest thing she has ever said.

MARY

(barely a whisper)

I will be okay.

Four words. Eleven letters. The same flat delivery Mary brings to everything. No drama. No performance. Just information, transmitted from one being to another in a language they built together over seven years.

Secret's eyes change. The effort drains out of them. The holding-on loosens. Something that was clenched releases.

Secret exhales. A long, slow breath. Her tail moves once against the bed.

Mary keeps her forehead against Secret's. She doesn't move. She doesn't take it back.

They stay like that. The room is dark. The house is quiet. Outside, Bellingham does what it always does -- rain on the roof, wind in the evergreens, the world continuing around two beings who built their own.

INT. MARY'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Light through the curtains. Early. Mary is in the same position. She hasn't moved.

Her hand is still on Secret's ribs.

They aren't rising.

Mary knows. She's known since before she opened her eyes. The body beside her is different. The warmth is leaving. The particular electricity of a living being -- the thing Mary has always been attuned to, the physical presence that was her anchor to the world -- is gone.

She doesn't move. Not yet. She stays.

The sound of the house waking up. Someone in the kitchen. Water running. The ordinary sounds of a morning in which nothing ordinary has happened.

Mary's hand on the ribs that are still.

She stays.

CUT TO BLACK.

Silence. Hold on black for a long time. Long enough for the audience to sit with it.

END OF ACT TWO